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## PRESS RELEASE

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### U.S. to provide life-saving HIV treatment to 43,000 people in Imo State

**Owerri- December 10, 2019:** The United States Government through the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria has assured the Imo State Government of its support for the identification and provision of treatment to approximately 43,000 people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the state, in addition to over 14,000 people already receiving such treatment through the PEPFAR program. The assurance was given, when the U.S. Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, Kathleen FitzGibbon, led a delegation from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on a courtesy call to the Governor of Imo State, Rt. Hon. Emeka Ihedioha.

She described the HIV epidemic in Imo State as critical, requiring rapid and sustained efforts for PLHIVs to be identified and put on life-saving antiretroviral treatment (ART). Such a move, she said will not only ensure that the PLHIVs live a long, normal, productive, and healthy life but will also help in breaking the transmission of the virus to sexual partners, thereby improving the state's health indices and moving it towards HIV epidemic control.

DCM FitzGibbon acknowledged the work that has been accomplished by the Government and other stakeholders, who partnered with PEPFAR and CDC over the years, such efforts ensured that over 14,000 people living with HIV in Imo State are receiving life-saving treatment. She noted that considering the over 43,000 others that need to be identified, all stakeholders must increase their efforts, as part of the CDC led PEPFAR ART surge in the State.

The Deputy Chief of Mission emphasized the significance of Imo State in the trajectory of HIV/AIDS epidemic control in Nigeria. Its population, geographic location, diversity, and status as a tourism and hospitality center in the south-east make it an important area of focus for the delivery of HIV/AIDS services in the country.

She highlighted to Governor Ihedioha the negative effect of the payment of some user-fees, which serves as a major barrier to people living with HIV from

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accessing treatment and urged for the immediate elimination of such fees, particularly fees charged by healthcare facilities for non-essential services or those already provided by PEPFAR.

Ms. FitzGibbon noted the U. S government's budget increase for HIV control activities in Nigeria, with increased focus on identifying and putting more people on treatment through the ART surge activities in several states, including Imo, which would enable more people living with HIV to lead healthy, productive lives, especially now that adherence to treatment leads to the virus becoming undetectable and therefore not transmittable to sexual partner.

She requested Governor Ihedioha to prioritize the procurement of additional HIV test kits to support the current PEPFAR initiated surge efforts. The additional test kits are necessary for identifying people living with HIV in communities and populations of the state. She emphasized that such urgent intervention will help in moving Imo State towards HIV epidemic control by September 2020.

The highlight of the visit to Imo state was the formal launch of the Imo State ART Surge Program by the State Governor. At the occasion, Governor Ihedioha expressed the commitment of his government to work with the U.S. Government and other stakeholders to change the HIV narrative in Imo State. He declared the immediate elimination of the payment of "user-fee" charges at the point of seeking care in Imo State hospitals and other health facilities, to serve as a major incentive to people living with HIV accessing treatment. He said the state and local governments will come up with a mechanism of reimbursing the facilities such fees that have now been waived.

Governor Ihedioha added that the state government had made provision in the 2020 budget for the purchase of additional HIV test kits to complement the commodities already being provided by PEPFAR to support the efforts of identifying more people living with HIV in communities and populations in the State.

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) administered by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), is implementing an Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) surge program in Imo State to rapidly identify and provide treatment to approximately 43,000 people living with HIV who have not previously received such treatment.

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The recently released data from the U.S.-supported Nigeria HIV/AIDS Indicator and Impact Survey revealed that there are approximately 1.9 million people still living with the virus in Nigeria. Approximately 58,000 are in Imo State. These people require appropriate medical treatment to live a normal, productive, and healthy life.

The U.S. Government recently announced support to Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Enugu, Lagos, and Nasarawa States for the launch of an ART Surge, a program designed to put an additional 500,000 people living with HIV on treatment. The 500,000 people would be in addition to the more than 800,000 people already on treatment as part of the overall PEPFAR intervention.

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